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ABSTRACT

Feeling that the key problem in working with delinquent adolescents is to help them bring their antisocial behaviors under control and establish more socially acceptable behaviors, the author points out that an important step is to change the pupil' attitudes about reading, test-taking, schools, and teachers. Suggested methods of motivation are knowledge of test results, rewards, social praise, and recognition. Recommended are programs of reading paperback books with an emphasis on book reports, adult modeling of reading behavior for delinquent adolescents disabled in reading, diagnostic teaching directed in small steps and coordinated with a concrete token system, and programs teaching visual-perceptual strategy to improve word recognition skills. References are included. (AW)

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DESIGN CONCEPTS FOR CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT OF DELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS

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Curriculum work with the institutionalized delinquent adolescent is a growing field, coming of age with the advent of treatment concepts, institutional designs, and a more humanistic philosophy conceived to cope with the burgeoning rate of youthful offenders.

Contingency management of pupils with atypical learning problems has been introduced as a promising way to get quick, positive changes in behavior. Staats (1970)[5], in his work with severely disabled adolescent readers who were also delinquent, showed that a program of contingencies based on improved low probability performance would produce a very significant increase in the frequency and rate of reading performance.

A key problem in work with delinquent adolescents is to help them bring their antisocial behaviors under control and establish more socially acceptable behaviors. Attending, responding, and following directions in a socially acceptable way (Hewett, 1970)[4] are the first order of business in any juvenile correction center.

There are other behaviors that are obviously debilitating the performance of the delinquent in the "straight" society. These pupils do not readily respond to social praise (Hewett, 1970)[4] and, as a result, do not sustain control under the non-reinforcing conditions of such praise. However, the proper adult model (that member of the staff who functions as a "high probability") can "teach" the value of social praise by developing an affect relationship with the pupil in which the concrete payoff for some success at reading performance can be accompanied by social praise. In turn, success in other aspects of reading

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performance can be rewarded by time with the high probability model. A simple point, but a very natural one that we do not properly recognize in our public school program.

Attitude is certainly a big factor in the failure pattern of the delinquent. Notable is his attitude about reading, test taking, schools, and teachers.

Staats (1966)[6] has shown that paying delinquent adolescents to take standardized tests results in a significant gain in reading achievement scores. It seems that the teacher's prior experiences with test giving causes her to operate in a way that is so neutral, or negatively reinforcing, to the child that failure is foreordained for the acting-out delinquent. It is clear that the delinquent sees no payoff in test taking and is not easily motivated to continue an endless string of negative experiences.

Attitudes are taught and reinforced by the experiences undergone by the pupil (Staats, 1970)[5]. In effect, the schools, teachers, and reading classes so condition the pupil's responses to negative experiences with them that all but the more dramatic programs, designed to readjust attitudes, are foredoomed to fail. It often happens that the more traditional institutional setting is structured to "pay off" for work in the laundry or the kitchen, and not for academic excellence, thus perpetuating the negative response to learning. In effect, the institution does not rehabilitate the very critical attitudes about school success, but seems bent on habituating the negative reaction to school by improperly managing the contingencies.

A most significant point in working with these pupils is to base the design on "contracts" that are small enough to be met by the teacher. In

many institutions the emphasis on a "complete" reading program, and curriculum, is so stress-producing for the untrained teachers that they resort to the more classic school patterns and immediately are identified in the same negatively reinforcing way as the delinquent's public schoolteachers. Research writings, and more practical experience, clearly indicate that this field is laden with affect skill problems. If the teacher learns to begin with small cognitive contracts, while focusing on the affect, then a much higher level of reading success can be predicted.

When the delinquent first arrives at the center, passive resistance is usually at a very high level. Hence, it is quite a problem "to quickly get" the pupil over this withdrawal behavior and into a skill improvement program.

These are just some of the considerations which entered into projects undertaken at the Youth Development Centers run by the State Department of Family and Children Services in Georgia. The state has two basic designs for its juvenile center program. One center is designed as a short-term holding facility before final juvenile court disposition of the case, while the other center concept administers to juveniles committed as wards of the court for a specified time. A recent development in Georgia is adoption of the Utah Plan emphasizing "day care" centers for juveniles, in the community in which he/she resides. Here they will attend classes during the day, in the center, rather than going to the public school, and will go home at night. More intensive care, remediation and instruction, and counseling will be emphasized.

When a juvenile is first admitted to a state center a natural reaction is to refuse to make a normal effort in the testing and academic programs. Because many centers have natural payoffs available which they tend to give

away--games, special trips, movies, reading materials, music, etc.--a program of contingencies was instituted to get (1) maximum achievement on tests very quickly, and (2) willing participation in the avhievement program.

Tests of sight vocabulary, flashed and untimed, were administered under alternate reward and non-reward conditions. Flashed recall was worth three points, remembering letter order two points, and untimed analysis one point. Under all three conditions the students, when paid, showed a significantly superior performance level to the non-rewarded pupils' performance during the testing. Since test-taking has been such a negatively reinforcing experience this program of "teaching the value of test-taking" is continued until the pupil can begin to succeed on simple tests, which then allows the instructor to reinforce with knowledge of results, social praise, and social recognition. The ultimate objective is to send the pupil back to the public school system with a willingness to give maximum effort on the tests required by the school. A similar reward-non reward design with reading disability cases by Aaron (1971), showed that approximately 20% of the rewarded pupils increased their reading instruction level on an informal reading inventory by as much as five months or more. Also, preliminary data observations by Bersoff (1971) and Aaron (1971) of severely disabled achievers, under individual intelligence testing conditions, appear to support the fact that heightened reinforcement scheduling during testing will improve performance scores for pupils with a history of school failure. Then, one element of a design for work with delinquent adolescents must be reinforcing a positive attitude toware test-taking experiences.

It is imperative in both the short and long-term institutional settings

"to quickly get" the pupil involved in an achievement activity. The public school program has proven negative and unrewarding to the pupil, so the emphasis must be shifted to some payoff that will be immediately effective. In order to combine the effect of the contingencies and peer reinforcement, which came to be one key thing the newly arrived pupils were unable to do without, a combination of group payoffs and weekly cash-ins was instituted. It was immediately apparent that pupils who did not respond to the academic program, at first, readily came around and performed after finding themselves confined on Friday while their peers were cashing in their points for music, games, comics, books, magazines, and other high probability activities. Once weekly, the pupils were assembled to get their tokens for the achievement activities during the week. This became a period when the peer group delivered a very high level of social praise as the totals were counted out for each person. This had its effect on the non-performing members and stimulated them to more effort.

A program of reading in high-interest pocketbooks was begun with an emphasis on reports being made on these books. The pupils readily purchased the books with their tokens, since they were motivating, but languished in their reading of them and were averaging only one report every two weeks. A design was instituted in which the comprehension skills were classified as literal or interpretive, as in Bloom's Taxonomy, and points assigned to the skills in each area, with the interpretive skills worth more than the literal. Pupils could answer the questions in writing or orally. Immediately the rate of reports increased to five every two weeks, and reports were now coming from pupils who had never given a report before. By further addition of

tape recording of the reports as another way of meeting the contract, an additional increase was achieved.

This simple design, interplaying intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, keeps the stress on the original purpose--to get more book reading behavior on the part of the pupils, in hopes that they will take back to the public schools a positive response to reading.

A subjective, performance-based testing program was instituted, as in any remedial diagnostic program, because it is much easier to use the results to define small contracts and logical beginning points for work with the pupils. A key factor was the need for a precise curriculum entry point where work could begin immediately, and on a sufficiently low level to allow a maximum amount of contingency management. Tests of contractions, inflected endings, phonics sounds, and other similar ones covering the basic terminal skills in reading, were used in a successive approximation strategy. Once a test was failed the pupil was placed in that skill group for remediation . The critical consideration in the concept is the fact that this straightforward design is highly reinforcing to the teacher. Many current attempts at contingency management of learning problems are implementing designs that involve too many, or too big, contracts for the pupil and, most important, for the teacher. A close look at several nearby behavior modification projects that have "failed" reveals that new curriculum materials, a new classroom design, inadequate skills mastery by teachers, an inadequate or inappropriate testing program, covering too many curriculum subjects, and instituting the components all at once is much too big a contract for the teacher. That's the rub! We jazz it up for the pupils. Individualize!, we tell the teacher. Meet him where he is learning! Reinforce! But, the whole scheme,

so glibly verbalized, is too much at once for the teacher and becomes a very negative experience as the pressure mounts from the need to fit all the components into a neat, experimental design. The real truth is that we do not understand the contingency management concept because we do not recognize that we must also make "small contracts" with the teacher so we can get success from her, reinforce the success, then build on this sane, humanistic approach.

For the delinquent adolescents who are disabled in reading it is important to find an adult model who is reinforcing to them, as soon as possible after they arrive at the center. If the teacher is compromised by a necessity to implement too many of the components at once, then she will invariably be cast in the role of "schoolteacher", a negatively reinforcing experience for the juvenile. As a result, the resistance the teacher meets from the pupils will manage her in the direction of more and more negative, punitive reactions to the pupil. It is vital that the teacher who works with the delinquent adolescent's reading problems learn to make small contracts for the pupil. It is equally important that the system not define contracts for the teacher which are so big that she will pass on to the pupils the same old impossible load and negative reinforcement, thus creating an affect barrier between herself and the pupils.

Diagnostic teaching is a catch word we see much of in today's reading education literature. If the behavioral goals, mastery of teaching skills, and affect are there, the addition of small steps and a concrete reward system for teachers can make this catch word a reality. Only the most capable of teachers can properly assess and store feedback on pupil skill mastery in her mind, then react with effective remediation. If small steps and a concrete token system are combined, then the teacher can effectively reinforce

herself about her successes and failures in the day-to-day teaching activities. The concrete act of giving tokens and seeing tokens earned should immediately let the teacher tabulate data on the pupils with which she did not succeed on a particular day. A color chip scheme can also serve as a means of letting her define the precise skills on which particular pupils did not succeed. In effect, she will be using a variation of Lindsley's concept of self-feedback.

Almost all pupils with reading problems, especially the delinquent adolescent, are quite weak in sight vocabulary. Flashed presentation of a wide range of sight words clearly shows that they can often name, in correct left to right order, all the letters in the word but cannot call the word, and have no apparent perceptual strategies of special letters, letter shapes, or letter-sound order by which to hold onto memory for the word. A program of strategy development involving interaction between the pupil and teacher, and a contingency management program with payoffs for successive steps mastered leading to a successful visual-perceptual strategy, should produce in the pupils a processing style that will make them more independent, and more efficient, in their word-recognition behavior.

A second program of sight word improvement grew out of an observation about the large number of "difficult" sight words that appear in modern comic books. A survey of one of the Archie comics resulted in a list of 104 sight words not known by the population of boys at one of the centers. Many of these were especially interesting because they were words like "truth, honesty, selfish, love, flesh, indecent," etc., that have therapeutic implications for these pupils.

Pupils earn points for each word learned as a flashed sight and meaning word. These words are then written into stories with readability levels to suit the instructional level of the pupil. These serve as reinforcement activities and as a check on the relationship between this vocabulary learning program and reading performance improvement.

The trend in delinquent adolescents is for the rate of girls to zoom and for all institutions to enroll a population with a much higher reading level. The coming trend in most states is for the number of institutionalized female delinquents to exceed that of males.

In order to help attack what is apparently deficit in critical thinking behavior a program using materials such as the Turner-Livingston Curriculum Motivated Series was developed. Many of the stories are very close to the experiences of the pupils and are used as a "surrogate" on which the pupils may "try out" their emotions and on which to practice the critical thinking skills before the teacher leads them through the "what would you do?" step, and into group interaction involving their own problems.

Taken as a total the previous suggestions could constitute a quite complete beginning curriculum for the juvenile detention centers, and, with some variations, would add significantly to the public school curriculum for the deviant adolescent.

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